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A Centennial Address

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BY

JOHN T. ALBRITTON.

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Island Creek Baptist church is the outcome of the missionary spirit that possessed and impelled our pioneer Baptist preachers of a hundred years ago. Had the churches, like the preachers, been likewise possessed and impelled, and had the wolf of dissension never entered the Baptist fold to alienate and scatter the Lord's sheep, instead of there being only seventeen Missionary Baptist churches in Duplin county, there would have been a church in every neighborhood in the county today. With pardonable pride and devout gratitude to God, we look back upon the work of our fore-fathers, enduring hardships, undertaking long, wearisome journeys on foot and on horse-back, foregoing the rest and domestic felicity of home-life, that they might carry the tidings of salvation to the destitute and perishing. Their heroic and self denying labors were performed without any other compensation than the consciousness of doing good and of having the approval of their Divine Master. It was the missionary spirit that brought Paul Palmer to North Carolina and led him to organize the first Baptist church in the State at Shiloh, Camden county, in 1727. The same spirit led him into Onslow county where he organized a Baptist church at New River. The same spirit moved Job Thigpen from Edgecombe to Duplin

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county about 1781. There was at that date but one Baptist church in the county —the church on Bear Marsh, constituted in 1763. Thigpen settled in the neighborhood of the present Muddy Creek church. He and his wife were the only Baptists in that section at that time. He had been preaching about a year as a minister of the free-will order, say Burkitt and Read in their "History of the Kehukee Association." A considerable number were baptized by him as the fruit of his ministerial labors. These, under the guidance of Robert Nixon, pastor of New River church, were received into the fellowship of the particular Baptist churches, and Nixon served them as pastor five or six years—or until February 25, 1792, when they were constituted into an independent Baptist church of 30 members. That is, Muddy Creek church was probably a branch of New River church up to 1792, when she became an independent body. So was Island Creek church a branch of Muddy Creek up to 1815, when she became likewise independent.

Elder Thigpen was ordained as pastor of Muddy Creek May, 1793, the presbytery consisting of Robert Nixon, John Dillahunty, and Francis Oliver. These facts concerning Thigpen and Muddy Creek church may be found in the "History of the Kehukee Association," published in 1803.

Like other pastors of that period Elder Thigpen sought to cultivate the destitute fields within his reach. Among these was the Island Creek community. Here several persons were led to embrace the Gospel as we hold it, and the earliest church records we can find, state that the members "met at Island Creek meeting house Friday before the fourth Lord's day in November, 1802, and chose Elder Francis Oliver moderator, and Bro. David Sloan clerk." Nothing is said about organizing; but the body is spoken of as "the members which afterwards composed this church." The fact that in 1802 they had a meeting house, and the nature of the business transacted indicate that the Island Creek body was a Baptist church for some time prior to the date of 1802. This earliest record states that letters of correspondence were received from Bull Tail,—now called Wells' Chapel,—Bear Marsh, and New River. Messengers were appointed to visit these churches. While the church considered herself a branch of Muddy Creek up to June 3, 1815, yet through all the intervening years, the brethree met at their own house, chose their moderator and clerk, and received, tried, dismissed, and expelled members just as any other Baptist church would do. In the minutes of July, 1803, they call themselves "the church." In the latter part of 1803, a brother Murray was

chosen by the church, and ordained by Elders Wells and Thigpen to serve them. September, 1804, Elder Thigpen read the letter to the (Neuse) Association, and the church raised two dollara for the Association fund.

We conclude, therefore, that Island Creek was a Baptist church long before the date of 1815, and for sometime before the date of 1802; but that uo to 1815 she was under the watch-care of Muddy Creek, tho mother church.

I will now call the earliest roll found on records. Probably most of the names are those of constituent members Males:—Joseph Johnson, James Murray, Richard Chasten, David Sloan, David Quinn, Zachariah Carter Joseph Hodgeson, Amos Sheffield, S Evans, Wm Chasten Stephen Sanders, Aaron Hodgeson, George Evans, Wm. Streets and Simon Wood Females:—Nancy Sloan, Mary Norris, Rilla Cavenaugh, Eunice Johnson, Esther Quinn, Anna Murray, Elizabeth Costin, Phebe Mouse, Clara Stallings, Elizabeth Hodgeson, Bethany Evans, Elizabeth Sutliff, Mary Streets, Sarah Evans, Martha Jones, Mary Powers and Ann Harrell. There were in all 32 members,—a goodly number with which to begin. Bear Marsh began in 1763 with 5 males and 5 females. The first Baptist church of Goldsboro began in 1843 with only 5 members. And the first Baptist

church on earth began in Galilee with only three members,—John, Andrew and the Saviour,—enough to claim the promise in Matthew 18:20. Bengel well calls this trio "the first beginning of the Christian church."

Island Creek church is fortunate in having preserved her records through nearly all the years of her existence. Many good and faithful men have served as clerks. Among the earliest officers serving in this capacity were Jacob Teachey and Hiram Murray. Hiram Murray and Hiram Stallings served the church about 22 years each,—the former as clerk, and the latter as pastor.

Among the ministerial brethren whose names are frequently found on the records of the first half of the last century, either as clerks, moderators, or pastors, are the following: Job Thigpen, Francis Oliver, Needham Whitfield, Joseph Johnson, Wm. Wells, Jacob Williams, Hiram Stallings, Wm. J. Finley, Benajah Carroll, David Rogers, and G. W. Hufham. There were, doubtless, others whose names do not now occur to me.

Much of the records up to the period of missionary awakening is dry and monotonous, stating who were the moderators, clerks, and messengers received from and sent to sister churches, and then that they adjourned for want of other business.

Now and then an offending member would be dealt with, and either excused or declared "ripe for excommunication"

Frequently, alas! too frequently, brethren would be reported for "transgression in drinking too much of spirituous liquors,"—a long phrase tenderly and delicately framed to express what we mean by the word drunkenness

On the whole, the records indicate that there was a good degree of spirituality among those old time brethren, and a promptness to reprove intemperance, dishonesty, unchastity, and other disorderly or unchristian conduct.

In 1816 the church arraigned a member on the charge of putting into the Association fund a non-passable 6 cent bit. He was promptly expelled after the brethren became satisfied that the act was intentional. 1806

In 1906, a member was reported for cruel treatment of one of his slaves. Having failed to bring the offender to repentance, the church expelled him from her fellowship. The slave-holding brethren of Island Creek, like the great mass of slave holders in the South, were generally kind to their slaves, and careful for their physical and moral welfare, building for them galleries and other apartments in their houses of worship. Many, like the Pettigrews and Collinses,

of Washington county, built chapels and employed pious and intelligent ministers for the spirttual benefit of their s aves In those days, such a monstrosity as a negro rapist was unknown among us. The good master was the rule: the bad master was the exception; and facts like the above give the lie to such vile sllinders as "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and other slanderous publications of a vitiated press.

VALUABLE HISTORY.

The records of Island Creek church are invaluable, as indicating the time at or near which the various churches within her reach sprang up; for it was a rule of the church to open correspondence with sister churches as fast as they came into being. In 1804 and 1805 she corresponded with Thomas' meeting house and Wolf Branch. I know not where these churches were situated. Benedict mentions a Jonathan Thomas, of Duplin One of these churches was probably in his neighborhood. There was correspondence between Island Creek and Nahunga, (now called Johnson), in 1807; and Concord in 1807; and Limestone, (now Hallsville), in 1811; and Beaver Dam, (now Magnolia), in 1834; and Mt. Holly, in 1835; and Kenansville in 1839. Correspondence was kept up with Muddy Creek, the mother church, until 1833

NUMERICAL GROWTH.

The records contain very meagre infor-

mation about the growth of the membership. The oldest church roll contains the names of 32 members. Associational minutes furnish the following statistics: The Cape Fear Minutes for 1822 reports 42 members. Richard Chasten and Hiram Murray were delegates The Goshen minutes report 56 members in 1834; 43 members in 1842; and 71 members in 1843. During this year 31 additions resulted from revival services The minutes of the Union, (now Eastern), Association for 1853 report 100 members; for 1883 172 members; for 1892 154 members; for 1902 229 members. This is the largest number found on the recored as belonging to this church

THE PASTORS OF THE CHURCH.

Elder Job Thigpen was pastor from the beginning to the year 1815. About this date he moved into another county,—too far away to continue his connection with the church.

In 1816 Jacob Williams, pastor of Limestone (Hallsville), consented to serve Island Creek quarterly, (and monthly when he could,) for one year. He continued to serve the church till his death in 1823 or '24.

The ordination of Hiram Stallings was called for in 1823, in order that he might become your pastor. He served you from June, 1824 to June 1846, or about 22 years. He was the honored father of Elder

J. N. Stallings, a brother known to many of you.

Elder W. M. Kennedy was called to supply the pulpit in 1854.

Elders G. S Best and H. R. Kornegay are mentioned as preaching and presiding from 1857 to 1863.

Elder John R. Oliver became pastor in 1863; Oliver Matthews in 1868, and Alfred Guy in 1869.

The first mention of pastor's salary was in 1870, when the church agreed to pay Bro. Guy $100 a year.

H. M. Croom became pastor in 1876, and G S Best again in 1878.

Your humble servant was pastor from June, 1883 to the close of 1892.

From 1892 to the present, brethren VanHoy, Carroll, Stewart and Tolar, and possibly others, whose names I do not now recall, have served the church. Brother J. N. Tolar, the present pastor, is leading the church forward in evangelistic work

BENEVOLENT WORK.

The records show that, for half a century or more, this church, like too many others in the State, did comparatively nothing for the spread of the Gospel in the regions beyond. Too long did our Baptist fathers seem to be ignorant of the world wide significance of the Redeemer's last command. We long seemed to be under the influence of the narrow

spirit that moved the old brother to pray: "Lord! bless me and my wife, my son, John, and his wife—us four, and no more!" Our attitude towards the great missionary enterprise was that of indifference or non-recognition, rather than of open hostility.

The earliest mention of a movement for the spread of the Gospel is found in the minutes of November, 1822, where Richard Chasten moved to raise a fund for traveling preachers. Bro. Chasten was one of the most Godly men ever connected with this church. After nearly fifty years of fellowship and service among you, he departed this life in 1851, in the 83rd year of his age. The church spread upon her minutes a resolution expressive of her great affection for him and her sense of irreparable loss in his departure.

In 1853 this church paid to the Executive committee $12 60 for Associational missions. In 1857 she gave $4.00 for the same object, and $16.00 for Warsaw High School.

Soon after becoming pastor in 1883, I persuaded the brethren to take up public collections for the various Associational and Conventional objects. Although it was feared by some that such a measure would diminish the congregation, they agreed to try quarterly collections. By 1889 we had moved up to monthly collec-

tions In 1883 we reported to the Association $18.00; in 1884 $23.00; in 1885 $17.35. (This year 23 members were dismissed to form a new church.) In 1891 we sent up $37.87. Under my successors in the pastorate, the contributions have continued to increase, those of 1898 amounting to $60 45. During my pastorate, the brethren were burdened with the expense of rebuilding their house of worship, at a cost of about $600. At the close of my ten years' work among them they did not owe their pastor a cent. Happy is the pastor who has such co-workers as were Chauncy Harrell, Enoch Hedge, the Mallards, the Teacheys, the Wallaces, the Browns, the Hancheys, the Wells, the Cooks, etc., besides honorable women not a few.

SOME PIONEER PREACHERS.

It is a matter of deep regret that we know so little about the foundation builders to whose sacrificing labors this old church owes her beginning. Then, we would like to know more about John Dillahunty and Robert Nixon, the two men who, with Francis Oliver, set apart to the full work of the Gospel ministry, Job Thigpen, the first pastor of Island Creek.

NEEDHAM WHITFIELD

was a wealthy planter living near White Hall, Wayne county. He was a member

of Bear Marsh church up to about 1805 or 1808. In 1811, according to Benedict, he was pastor of Pleasant Plains in Wayne county.

ROBERT NIXON,

of Onslow county, was pastor of New River in said county, the church planted by Paul Palmer, and of a church on White Oak river in Jones county. Burkitt and Read, in their "Kehukee Association," speak of Elder Nixon as being a remarkably pious and zealous minister of the Gospel. Dr. J D. Hufham says that "during the war of the revolution, the Commlttee or Council of Safety made an appropriation of ten pounds or fifty dollars for his voluntary services in ministering to the soldiers who were defending the coast" After a long and useful life, he was called home by the Master December 4th, 1794,—or about a year and a half after his service in the ordination of Island Creek's first pastor.

JOHN DILLAHUNTY

was born in Kent county, Maryland, December 8th, 1728, of Catholic parentage. About the middle of the 18th century he came to North Carolina and settled on Neuse river about thirty miles above Newbern. He became sheriff of the county. When God converted him, he became a Baptist, to the grief and amazement of his friends. In 1756 he and oth-

ers organized a church on South-west creek, Lenoir county. In 1781 he gathered ten members at Chinquapin Chapel, Jones county Here he was ordained to the full work of the ministry by Abraham Baker and Robert Nixon. In 1796 Dillahunty left the State for Tennessee, and the following year organized a Baptist church on Richland creek. Benedict says of this church that it was "the first Baptist church which was gathered on the South side of the Cumberland river. The Rev. John Dillahunty took the care of this church at its commencement, and he continues their much respected pastor." —Benedict's History, of 1813. After a long and useful ministry of nearly fifty years, he died in 1816, at the advanced age of 88 years.

WILLIAM WELLS

was born about the middle of the 18th century. On the West side of the W. & W. Railroad, not far from the public road leading from Magnolia to Concord Baptist church, there stands an old, dilapidated building,—if indeed it is yet standing,—which has been pointed out to me as the old home of this consecrated minister of the Gospel. The first years of his ministry were spent with the Methodist denomination. I have in my possession an old Methodist Discipline, printed about 1797, which was once his property. There is a tradition, as I learned

from Mrs. James Heath, his grand-daughter, several years ago, that while Bro. Wells was a Methodist ministrr, he and one of the Coopers—William or Fleet—agreed to have a public debate on baptism at Bull Tail, now called Wells' Chapel. Brother Wells, to fortify himself, began a diligent and praverful search of the Scriptures,—a dangerous thing for a Pedobaptist to do, who wishes to remain steadfast in his views upon that subject. The result was that on the day appointed for the debate, the disputants found themselves on the same side of the question; and consequently, the debate was called off, and Brother Wells henceforth became a devout believer in, and defender of, the Baptist faith.

One peculiarity of Bro. Wells was his refusal to accept compensation for ministerial and pastoral labor. He had seen the evil of "compulsory support" by taxation during the existence of the State establishment, and had swung, like many others, from that extreme to the opposite extreme of "no support" at all from the churches. On one occasion, Bro. Wells, after having preached, and before leaving the house was tendered a purse of about $20.00. He reluctantly took it, and then passed it to a poor widow near him. The brethren were aggrieved. "Why," said he, "after you gave it to me, was it not mine to dispose of as I pleased?" "Yes,"

said they. "Besides," he continued, "you will readily admit that this poor widow needs the money worse than I do." Thus he silenced them.

ELDER FRANCES OLIVER

came from Virginia to Onslow county in early life. He came to Duplin county about 1783 and settled upon a plantation near Bear Marsh church, which is still held and occupied by some of his descendants. Mr. Joseph B. Oliver, one of his grand-sons, and one of Duplin's foremost citizens, now lives upon the plantation. Frances Oliver served his adopted State as a member of the Convention to consider the Federal Constitution.

He was ordained to the pastorate of Bear Marsh church May 17, 1792. During his pastorate he was actively engaged in mission work among those destitute of Gospel privileges. Pleasant Plains, Nahunga, (now called Johnson), and Thunder Swamp churches were some of the fruits of his missionary labors.

Elder Oliver, while on a visit to kindred in Georgia, was attacked by a sickness which terminated in his death. This occurred in 1808 in the State of Georgia.

Brethren, I have lingered to tell you what little I know about some of the brethren who were often moved by the spirit to come to Island Creek to worship God and enjoy the sweet fellowship of your fathers.

Brethren, while we honor the fathers for the great work they accomplished in their day of limited opportunities and advantages, let us not forget that the great Head of the church expects of us far greater results with our far superior facilities and wide open doors of opportunity. Christ has made the fulfilment of His gracious will in the furtherance of His Kingdom the burden of the daily prayer of His people. Oh! that He may bless you with an over-mastering desire and purpose to be faithful to Him, and to the solemn obligations you voluntarily assumed as members of His church!